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ABSTRACT

There is recent, widespread activity in Australian education and training sectors to improve the transition of young people from initial education to further education and training and employment. Many jurisdictions have conducted high-level reviews of the institutional arrangements underpinning the transition process. The focus has been mainly on broadening the purpose of the post-compulsory years of education and training for those age 15-19 years. Recently developed national goals and a conceptual framework for expanding vocational education in schools lay out the strategies to raise levels of achievement and skills of all young people to prepare them for adult life as active, responsible citizens. A seminal OCED report has conceptualized the major approaches, and these are a significant reference point for ongoing policy development in Australia. The central notion in the OCED framework is well-organized, flexible transition pathways that connect initial education with work or further study or training. It takes into account the lengthening period for successful transition to independent adult life and need to keep all young people moving along a positive track. This report focuses on: (1) "Key Concepts for Transition Pathways" (OCED parameters for transition); (2) "Snapshot: National, Commonwealth and State Strategies"; and (3) "Transition Strategies: Progress around Australia" (e.g., explicit, well-articulate pathways; lifelong learning skills; individual assistance for students at-risk; and community partnerships). (SM)

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Overview of Transition Programs

Policies and Programs

A Report prepared for the Business Council of Australia by
The Allen Consulting Group

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Executive Summary

There is recent and widespread activity in education and training sectors around Australia to improve the transition of young people from initial education to further education and training and employment. The social and economic price of young people leaving school early, failing to continue training or find productive employment is considerable and finding sustainable solutions that are integrated with mainstream practices is the current challenge for governments around Australia.

A number of jurisdictions have conducted high-level reviews of the institutional arrangements underpinning the transition process with a particular emphasis on those experiencing difficulties in making a successful transition to independence in adult life. The focus has mostly been broadening the purpose of the post compulsory years of education and training for those in the fifteen to nineteen year old age group. Recently developed national goals and a conceptual framework for expanding vocational education in schools lay out the strategies to raise the levels of achievement and skills of all young people to prepare them for adult life as active and responsible citizens.

It is therefore fair to conclude that policy makers and practitioners are seriously grappling with the complexity of ensuring that change in education and training matches the pace of wider economic and social change and that all young people benefit. The equity and skill development themes that run through the current pattern of activity in Australia are similar to those in other OECD countries. A seminal OECD report[1], to which Australia contributed, conceptualised the major approaches and these continue to be a significant reference point for ongoing policy development around Australia.

The central notion in the OECD framework is well-organised and flexible transition pathways that connect initial education with work or further study or training. This calls for major structural changes around qualifications and courses, introducing more vocational content and providing workplace experience combined with education. The pathways concept takes into account the lengthening period for successful transition to independent adult life and the need to keep all young people moving along a positive track. Inspiration is also drawn from the Nordic countries that have achieved impressive success with safety net mechanisms for those at risk of leaving school early. The progress and choices of young people are tracked to quickly identify early school leavers and re-insert them into a supportive education environment. A significant feature of this strategy is a high degree of local accountability across the community and a strong view that the public institutional arrangements need to be highly responsive to the needs of the individual, not vice versa as is often the case. Good career and course information and guidance is also recognised as a core requirement. Strong institutional frameworks where roles and responsibilities are clear – including for funding, partnerships are facilitated and best practice is shared, are seen as fundamental underpinnings for positive outcomes.

[1] OECD. (1999.) *Thematic Review of the Transition From Initial Education to Working Life: Final Comparative Report.* Paris: OECD.

Given that as a framework, how is Australia progressing? These themes are evident in many policy statements and initiatives around Australia but it is early days. The following chart summarises the major elements of reform under the categories in the *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools* agreed in 2001 by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), comprising all Ministers for Education. The consultants have made an indicative assessment of progress. (State and Commonwealth Government activities are described in fuller detail in the main body of this report.)

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Box ES 1.1

TRANSITION STRATEGIES: PROGRESS AROUND AUSTRALIA

MCEETYA: Transition features	Key elements of the framework and progress
Explicit and well articulated pathways *(more flexible options to expand choice and smoothly link to outcomes)*	**Vocational education and training** ***STRONG PROGRESS*** VET in Schools is the main feature. Offered in 90 % of secondary schools although character (e.g. depth) varies widely according to states' policies. Moderate success with School-Based New Apprenticeships at 2 % of VET in Schools enrolments although structural and cultural barriers impede expansion – enhanced employer incentives by Commonwealth Government likely to drive further growth. Industry coverage (particularly emerging industries), assuring quality, including workplace experience and relations between schools and TAFE are issues to resolve. Adaptation of qualifications is occurring to be more inclusive of mixing vocational and general education options in post compulsory years. New 're-entry' certificates emerging in some jurisdictions.
Lifelong learning skills and attributes *(such as positive attitudes to learning and employability skills)*	**Enterprise and vocational learning** ***SLOW PROGRESS*** The concepts appear vague. Adoption of 'enterprise education' is patchy. New Commonwealth body ECEF will build greater capacity for business involvement. Schools' application of BCA/ACCI Employability Skills Framework currently being examined.
Individual assistance for students at risk *(individualised assistance)* Career information and guidance and access to student services	**Student support services** ***SLOW PROGRESS*** Needs and best practice strategies well documented (e.g. tracking, exit plans, case management). Challenge is high cost of individualised techniques and changing mainstream practices. Maximising support services for those most at risk requires ambitious cross-sectoral strategies. A 2002 national commitment to an action plan for cross-agency collaboration shows promise but will need support beyond education departments. Expanding career education is expensive and complex. Specific allocation of teachers varies. Advice and guidance systems continue to expand, especially electronic but lack coherence and co-ordination for clients. Advice may be better conducted as a shared public and commercial activity where market / client needs provide a sharper focus. A National Blueprint is in development .
Community partnerships *(schools, TAFE, business, community and all levels of government)*	**Community and business partnerships** ***STRONG PROGRESS*** A number of jurisdictions have innovative local community networks to co-ordinate services and capture commitment of business, local providers etc. Shows potential to mature into major feature of transition infrastructure. Issue is voluntary partnerships cannot be mandated by public policy. Challenge is defining an inviting and substantive role that ensures support by main stakeholders. Role of enterprises is vital but schools are relatively inexperienced. TAFE could assist schools with enterprise links.
Supportive institutional and funding arrangements *(coherent policies)*	**Effective institutional and funding arrangements** ***MODERATE PROGRESS*** Flexible and cross-sectoral co-operation does not appear to be institutionalised through funding and performance accountabilities. Some progress being made for core funding of school and TAFE to take additional transition needs into account rather than depend on discretionary top-up funding. Recent structural initiatives in a number of jurisdictions e.g. merge schools and TAFE administration; consolidate qualifications authorities, and multi-campus sites. Consideration also of how resource allocation could follow the young person's choice of learning location.
Monitoring and evaluation *(data collection on success rates)*	**Monitoring and evaluation** ***MODERATE PROGRESS*** Outcomes are the most problematic to ascertain for those who fall between the cracks. New student exit tracking plans are yielding positive results. Aligning schools and TAFE data gathering is occurring. National forums facilitate sharing evaluations but different administrative histories and conventions around Australia often inhibit simple transfer of good practice.

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Solutions to the transition needs of those young people currently failing to make smooth progress to independent adult life are not simple. Transition needs have changed dramatically in the past two decades with the restructuring of the youth labour market. Targets for increasing participation, retention and student achievement mean more young people are staying on in education and training institutions but many have multiple barriers to achieving good outcomes.

The task for institutions will be to motivate and genuinely raise the achievement levels of those at risk of not succeeding. Given the state of play in Australia the challenges seem to fall into four areas: achieving the ambitious cross-government collaboration on which solutions depend; building genuine local community accountability; accepting mainstream responsibility for the resource intensive nature of assisting those missing out; and dealing more effectively with poor engagement with schooling in the years prior to the post compulsory levels. These challenges are explained further below:

- A fundamental need is achieving the high-level institutional flexibility and cross-sectoral co-ordination on which solutions depend. This is a matter for governments to determine. Leaving institutional co-ordination to the discretion of the agencies themselves will not achieve the desired outcomes.

- Engaging the interest and assistance of the local or regional communities, especially enterprises, is central to sharing responsibility and accountability for the quality of outcomes for all young people. Government has to find innovative ways to facilitate the shared ownership of social conditions – it cannot mandate voluntary community involvement. Business and community also need to communicate how best to involve them. Strengthening local accountability and making the community the site for innovative solutions would require a change in the prevailing public policy framework but is consistent with what is emerging elsewhere (e.g. United Kingdom) as best practice.

- Making the hard decisions on resource allocation should mean solutions for those at risk of not achieving good transition outcomes are not just tacked onto the mainstream provision. Education and training institutions have always dealt with those with special needs. The change recognised by reforms occurring around Australia is that those who are still missing out will be increasingly difficult to accommodate without a resource injection and institutional change.

- Achieving the anticipated retention and transition success rates in many cases requires increasing representation from those groups currently under represented – those from rural areas, males, low-income family backgrounds, those with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills and those who express little engagement with schooling. Changing the patterns for these groups needs to commence in the early years of schooling and continue through to the post compulsory years. That opens a further set of challenges.

The OECD identified a 'youth friendly' labour market as a requirement for successful transition pathways. A role for Australian business is to engage as an active partner in the transition activities now being generated around Australia.

Section One

Key Concepts for Transition Pathways

More young people and adults need to be better educated than ever before but the policy environment for education and training has become decidedly more complex over the past decades. While governments are confronting the need for continued fiscal restraint, they are also facing increasing demands to alleviate social and economic disadvantage, build more robust local communities and 'social capital' and, at the same time, establish the fundamentals for supporting a globally competitive economy. The skills of the population and the capabilities of industry are under scrutiny with a renewed focus on human capital. Consensus is emerging in Australia that education is pivotal to our success in the global economy, for social cohesion and healthy communities and that our institutional structures and approaches need to be reviewed in the light of changing demands.

As a reaction to the collapse of youth labour markets in the 1980s and 1990s, the Finn Report in 1991,[2] was the first nationally agreed set of targets for increasing school and post-school participation rates by 2001. The Finn targets seemed eminently achievable at that time, responding to the need for enhanced skills and improving the welfare of young people. They were the result of extensive consultation and international benchmarking. State and federal governments agreed that by 2001, 95 per cent of nineteen year olds nationally should be participating in, or have completed Year 12 or the equivalent level in vocational training. The target for twenty-two year olds was that 60 per cent would have completed or be participating in education and training programs which lead to the level of a trade certificate or higher to diploma and degree levels. Attaining these levels of participation and qualifications 'would have made young Australians among the best qualified of all the OECD countries.'[3]

The magnitude of the challenge ahead is demonstrated by the fact that neither target has been attained with a short fall of around 10 percent for the target for nineteen year olds and around 8 percent for the twenty-two year olds[4]. (Governments ceased a number of years ago to measure progress against the Finn targets.) The Finn Report and subsequent reviews reinvigorated vocational education in schools as part of an overhaul of the notion of vocational competencies in the wider VET system. However, the ongoing changes to the nature of the youth labour market and the failure to reach the Finn targets and other similar projections have directed attention to the increasingly complex nature of the transition from school to work or further study and new strategies are emerging.

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[2] Finn, T., B., (Chair). (1991.) *Young People's Participation in Post–Compulsory Education and Training*, Report of the Australian Education Council Review Committee. Canberra: AGPS.

[3] Directorate for Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD. (1997.) *The Transition from Initial Education to Working life*, Country Note: Australia, Paris: OECD

[4] Dusseldorp Skills Forum, (2002.) *How young people are faring, key indicators 2002. An Update About the Learning and Work Situation of Young Australians*. Sydney: Dusseldorp Skills Forum

While a prime focus remains on ensuring young people acquire the right skills for the contemporary workplace, there is now additional scrutiny of the characteristics of the lengthening transition phase. Young people are staying at school for longer periods and taking longer to settle into stable work. The youth labour market has changed dramatically with the almost total disappearance of fulltime work for early school leavers. Some young people seem to become trapped in work that is temporary and marginal, despite an overall rise in demand for higher skills and qualifications. Of course, most young people do make satisfactory transitions but some are more vulnerable and need additional assistance and a small minority experience multiple disadvantages and require intensive support to avoid becoming fully marginalised.[5]

Severe disadvantage and poverty today is increasingly taking the form of groups disassociated from mainstream economic and social life. It is defined not only in monetary terms but also in the linkages people have with the mainstream lifestyle.[6] Making a successful transition from school to working life is central to combating the multi-dimensional nature of disadvantage. As the Kirby Review[7] in Victoria found, young people today are facing difficulties not faced by previous generations. The persistence and the severity of these obstacles, frequently concentrated in particular groups and regions require a new and broad commitment by government, business and the community.

OECD Parameters for Transition

A seminal OECD report[8] on the transition from initial education to working life conceptualised this transition phase around the need for smooth pathways. While there are options for young people to pursue a number of pathways through general education, apprenticeships, vocational education or various combinations of these, it is the quality, clarity and flexibility of the learning pathway and the qualifications framework that increase the chance of positive transition outcomes.

The OECD proposed some basic goals that all transition policies should aim for and these have more or less become the framework that guides Australian governments' objectives and policies for effective transition. These include:

- High proportions of young people completing a full upper secondary education with a recognised qualification for either work, tertiary study or both.
- High levels of knowledge and skill among young people at the end of the transition phase;
- A low proportion of teenagers being at the one time not in education and unemployed.
- A high proportion of those young adults who have left education having a job.
- Few young people remaining unemployed for lengthy periods after leaving education.

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[5] Ministerial Council on Education, Employment Training and Youth Affairs. (2002.) *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools. Policy Directions*. Adelaide: Curriculum Corporation.

[6] OECD. (2001.) *Territorial Outlook: Territorial Economy*. Paris: OECD

[7] *The Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training pathways in Victoria*, (The Kirby Review), (2000.) Victoria: Department of Employment Education and Training.

[8] OECD. (1999.) *Thematic Review of the Transition From Initial Education to Working Life: Final Comparative Report*. Paris: OECD.

- Stable and positive employment and educational histories in the years after leaving upper secondary education; and
- An equitable distribution of outcomes by gender, social background and region.

The OECD Review highlighted the key ingredients of successful transition systems that would achieve these goals. These elements represent the core concepts that underpin many subsequent policies and initiatives in federal, state and territory governments in Australia. The core features of an inclusive transition system include:

A healthy economy and youth friendly labour market

A robust economy with high employment is the pre-eminent requirement for effective transition from initial education to work. When jobs are plentiful they are most likely shared with the young but, with restructuring of the economy, a flow on to young people increasingly depends on the degree to which the labour markets and enterprises are 'youth friendly'. Young people need opportunities to become familiar with workplaces, have ample combinations of work and training and employers need to value recruiting young people and putting them on a job pathway. A strong youth friendly labour market will also go some way to protecting young people from worsening economic conditions.

Well-organised pathways that connect initial education with work and further study.

Well-defined and successful pathways, whether apprenticeships, general education, school-based vocational education or combinations, depend on close connections between the pathway and the destination. Indeed, the quality of the outcome can depend more on these tight connections than on the education and training option. Success also comes from providing young people with a wide choice of pathways and being flexible in allowing movement between options. Flexible pathways are evident when links between vocational pathways and tertiary study are established; vocational content in general education in increased and vice versa; an institutional setting offers more than one pathway; and, modular curriculum facilitates varied combinations of areas of study.

Workplace experience combined with education

While the apprenticeship is the traditional and more formal model there are many other approaches to workplace and education combinations such as school organised workplace experience, workplace education integrated into the curriculum and drawing on the learning from students part-time and holiday jobs. Critical success factors include quality control of the workplace experience, shared ownership among all the parties, active employer participation and flexible institutional arrangements.

Tightly knit safety nets for those at risk

Inclusive transition policies seek high rates of participation and successful completion of upper secondary education. Achieving high rates of school achievement reduces the number of early school leavers who are most at risk due to low levels of literacy, numeracy and vocational skills. The OECD argues that focussing in the first instance on high levels of secondary achievement reduces the cost of safety nets for those few who fall out of the system. Safety nets should have tracking mechanisms that closely monitor those who have fallen between the cracks and rapidly re-insert them into suitable education and training. The Nordic countries have set a high standard for safety nets. They focus on prevention as well as remediation; have an integrated approach to education, labour market and welfare policies and have a well–honed local tracking and delivery mechanism to co-ordinate practical assistance on a case-by-case basis.

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Good information and guidance

The vital role of good information is acknowledged but a key challenge is providing universal access to high quality information and guidance services in an affordable way. A successful system will include: authoritative and accurate job and course information; self-directed techniques for personal assessment and searching information; career education in the curriculum, experience in real-workplace settings; and systematic involvement of the community, including employers.

Effective institutions and processes.

High quality relationships and partnerships between educational institutions, enterprises and communities are as important as the policy settings. This calls for a genuine sense of shared ownership and local responsibility that is recognised and encouraged by the relevant authorities.

This OECD report has laid out an invaluable framework that has subsequently guided reviews and policy development at the federal, state and territory levels. While there have been many instances of well-established practices for effective transition in schools, TAFEs and communities operating around Australia before the OECD report, converting them into state wide policies and commitments has been a relatively recent activity. Consolidating best practice in national and State policies is the task ahead. As the OECD framework proposes, the changes required are institutional, structural and cultural.

The following section examines the nationally agreed strategies, state initiatives and the pattern of activity that is now apparent around Australia.

Section Two

Snapshot: National, Commonwealth and State Strategies

This section provides a brief overview of the approaches being adopted around the country to improve the transition outcomes for young people, especially for those most at risk of leaving school early. Based on the pattern of activity around Australia, the next section draws some conclusions regarding the progress that the country appears to be making in responding to the transition needs of young people.

One clear observation is that there is widespread activity currently occurring with many major policy reviews either just completed or underway. Changes are being instituted to the core institutional structures as well as to the programs on the ground and this is a distinguishing feature compared to strategies in the past. Another change from past practices is that individuals, specially those most in need are becoming the focal point rather than the programs themselves – one size does not fit all. Resource questions are being considered and new networks and partnerships are being facilitated in the spirit of community involvement, which is a significant feature of progressive public policy in many countries. There is the recognition that Government cannot do it all and voluntary cooperative community structures are being sought. While many of the initiatives now being profiled have been in existence for some time – teachers and others have known what works – the recent developments are bringing these ideas into mainstream institutional practices.

Nationally Agreed Strategies

A growing range of nationally agreed initiatives is underway that expands and improves vocational education in schools in its broadest sense. This effort is a response to the changing profile of skills needed in the global knowledge economy and an attempt to find practical solutions for assisting those young people who are not acquiring the skills to work and live in the dramatically changed social and economic environment. These initiatives are ambitious in that they are encouraging rethinking of the relationship between school, business and the community and calling for significant cross-sectoral government initiatives.

The *Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, agreed by all Ministers for Education April 1999, articulate the shift in the educational and social commitment to young people and signal the broadening of school education and the new relationships needed with the community. The goals contain a range of references to vocational education and training in schools and to the desired linkages and partnerships between education and training, the business sector and the community. They include the role of vocational leaning, completion of year 12 or equivalent and require access to clear pathways to employment and further education and training to be available for all.

In response to the national goals, a *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools* was agreed 2001 that supports the expansion of vocational education and student support services in schools. While jurisdictions implement the framework in different ways there is a national commitment to ensure vocational offerings are part of the school curriculum and that access to career education and student services are accessible to all, particularly those most at risk of leaving school early.

The framework contains six key features that are drawn from the OECD transition review discussed in the previous section. Accordingly, the framework employs the concept of pathways to ensure positive outcomes for young people are maximised by having multiple options that are suited to different needs. The features are as follows:

- *Explicit and well-articulated pathways*. This is seen through the expansion of vocational education and training in schools and alignment with mainstream assessment and qualifications regimes. The goal is that these programs are absorbed into schools and systems recurrent budgets and cease to be discretionary initiatives.

- *Lifelong learning skills and attributes and enterprise and innovation*. This is seen through enterprise and vocational learning in schools that develop employability skills, which comprise personal attributes that contribute to overall employability and a set of key skills or competencies for the workplace.

- *Individual assistance to students at risk and career information and guidance*. This is seen through co-ordinated student support services that provide readily accessible information and, where necessary, case management to support the many young people experiencing difficulties with a smooth transition.

- *Community partnerships*. Partnerships draw on the resources and assistance of community and business in addition to that provided by schools and training providers. Partnerships are seen as essential in moving forward with this agenda.

- *Supportive institutional and funding arrangements*. The objective is to achieve greater stability in government funding for this framework, greater co-operation at the community level and greater flexibility in institutional arrangements.

- *Monitoring and evaluation*. Knowing who is missing out is a fundamental requirement for targeting assistance. More effective tracking and monitoring of outcomes is essential but this calls for systematising data collection around the country.

In July 2002 MCEETYA proposed an *Integrated Action plan* be developed to respond to the Federal Governments *Footprints to the Future* report arising from the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce. The plan will support the jurisdictions in implementing an effective national approach to youth transitions so that education and training, other areas of government, business and the community understand and act on their shared responsibility to support young peoples' transition to adult life. In the statement of intent *Stepping Forward – improving pathways for all young people*, Ministers for Education have recognised that while the majority of young people are doing well, all young people, especially those most at risk, would benefit from a system of strategic interventions that are 'grounded in cross-agency co-operation' This calls for further investment in support systems.

Commonwealth Government

While the state and territory governments have the constitutional responsibility for school education the role of the Commonwealth is one of national leadership. A number of initiatives to improve the transition of all young people from school for employment and further study are summarised below.

The Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce *Footprints to the Future* (2001) is also structured around the idea of young people needing multiple and flexible pathways. The Taskforce found that schools were not catering well for those not going on the higher education and that young people consistently call for relevant, flexible and accessible schooling. It found that many young people need help in negotiating these pathways and the recommendations were consistent with the findings of the OECD review of transition from initial education to working life. It also recommended local community responsibility and partnerships in supporting young people.

The Commonwealth is funding a number of pilot initiatives to test out strategies that respond to the Taskforce's recommendations. A key initiative is the *Career and Transition (CAT) pilot programme* that will evaluate innovative ways of improving the quality of career education and advice to young people, including those who have left school. A broad spread of welfare, employment and community groups as well as combinations of schools and other providers have been funded to employ transition advisors.

The *Enterprise and Career Education Foundation* was established in 2001 as a Commonwealth company to support and promote vocational education in schools and encourage effective partnerships through linking business, schools and the community. It does this through funding support structures in community networks and undertaking research and promotional activities. It is particularly important in assisting the spread of structured workplace learning as a valuable and practical component of vocational studies in schools.

VET in Schools and *School-Based New Apprenticeships* are initiatives that provide school students with the opportunity to gain credit towards a senior secondary certificate through gaining a nationally recognised industry qualification or credit towards one. VET in Schools has been remarkably successful in terms of participation. It is offered in around 90 percent of schools, although the depth varies, and is clearly an attractive option for many students. School-Based New Apprenticeships are a more demanding option and still in the establishment phase at around 2 per cent of the enrolment of VET in Schools. While vocational education in schools has had a long history, the Commonwealth has provided crucial additional funding to states and territories to assist schools expand vocational options and gain the support of employers and unions.

Highly credible research in Victoria into student outcomes from VET in Schools shows that VET in Schools' students are over represented in the lowest achievement levels and underrepresented in the upper achievement levels. After taking these different levels of academic achievement into account, VET in schools students are seen to enjoy positive labour market outcomes and rates of transition to further study compared with non-VET students. They are also less likely to be unemployed.

The *Youth Allowance* was introduced July 1998 to remove disincentives for young people (16-17 year olds) to participate in study or training. The Commonwealth Government sees that the conditions for the Youth allowance are consistent with the *Footprints to the Future* findings in aiming to keep young people engaged in school, training or employment. While it is problematic to attribute changes in young peoples' participation in education and training solely to the effect of the Youth Allowance, the government believes there has been a positive effect. An increase in participation rates for 16 –17 year olds from 79.2 per cent to 81.4 per cent over the first year and sustained over the next two years seems to have drawn largely from the groups of young people most at risk of poor employment outcomes.

Data from states confirms the changing pattern of participation in education and training arising from the Youth Allowance with the additional observation that these young people are opting for TAFE rather than schools. Enrolments of 15-19 year olds in TAFE in NSW, for example, have grown by 25 percent since 1996, raising implications for the capacity of TAFE to cope with an increasing number of young people with a different set of needs to the traditional TAFE client base.

Similar to other governments, the Commonwealth Government has made commitments to increase the participation and outcomes for Indigenous young people. The retention rates are around half that of non-Indigenous Australians and there is very low, but growing, participation in VET in Schools and School-Based New Apprenticeships. Initiatives include *Partners in a Learning Culture*, a VET strategy for 1999 to 2003 that provides strategies and performance measures for VET in Schools.

New South Wales Government

The Department of Education and Training has established a range of initiatives to respond to the transition challenge. The main institutional and structural initiatives are the establishment of district offices, changes to the HSC to strengthen the standing of vocational studies, and the operation of five senior colleges.

Forty *District Offices* provide support to schools. Each district has a Student Services and Equity Coordinator who oversees specialist support to students. The focus of all support is the student's engagement with learning and identifying the other skills needing further development

The successful *VET in Schools* program has been accompanied by *changes to the HSC* in 2001 that strengthened the standing and quality of Vocational studies in schools. Students are able to study vocational courses which have clear links to post school destinations, especially further training and employment One in three senior school students in NSW now studies a vocational course as part of their HSC.

Five multi-campus senior colleges give senior students access to an expanded and more flexible curriculum including TAFE and university courses. Some specifically cater for those disaffected with traditional schooling and those seeking special assistance for re-entry to study while others are for the highly motivated who are seeking an alternative and adult learning environment. Research in 2000 found that students and teachers were 'very happy' with their senior colleges, positive about the schools capacity to deliver on academic and vocational goals and boys were as satisfied as the girls. The results also showed an improvement over 1996 results, which at that time demonstrated students had a higher level of satisfaction than their peers in regular 7-12 high schools. It is postulated this is due to the adult learning environment with the emphasis of responsibility and the breadth of subjects with effective vocational options.

Specific programs are provided by the NSW government to help students who are at risk of leaving school early or becoming disengaged with the learning process. Whilst these programs focus on education and training, many include inter–agency collaboration and community partnerships. They include:

The Plan-it Youth Mentoring Program. The Plan-it Youth Mentoring Program matches young people at risk of leaving school early with TAFE trained adult mentors. The mentors help students plan their education and training pathways and investigate career options. The mentors assist students deal with the challenges of schools, relationships with peers and teachers, family life, work placement and employment. Around 95 per cent of students who participated in the project in 1998 remained at school, went into vocational education and training or became employed.

Gateways Program. This covers a range of strategies that provides individual programs for young people who may not complete Year 12. The Gateways program started in 2001 and includes drug education, individual education plans for students, vocational and life skills courses, and teacher mentors. Results are very positive with many students thinking of dropping out now remaining at school and teachers have reported reduced truancy rates.

Helping Young People at Risk. This program is aimed at the most disadvantaged young people in NSW, aged 15 to 18. It provides pathways to further education and employment. This includes young people who have been in the juvenile justice system, homeless, long-term unemployed or have left school early. The Helping Young People at Risk program is managed at the local level by TAFE institutes. The program requires close cooperation between schools, TAFE NSW and other appropriate agencies and community organisations.

Links to Learning Program. The program funds a range of community based education and training initiatives in locations of need for young people who experience significant difficulties participating in formal learning environments. Young people at risk are assisted to engage with a 'next-step' course or activity to access, remain in or return to education or training in order to complete, as a minimum, two years post compulsory education or accredited training. Approximately 4,000 young people are assisted each year.

Priority Action Schools. This is a new program for 2003 and will assist approximately 70 schools. The *Priority Action Schools Program* will trial intensive support to address unique social, welfare, safety and educational concerns in targeted schools to reduce violence, vandalism and suspensions and to improve attendance. This program recognises that concentrations of disadvantage need a concentration of help.

Tutorial Centres. The seventeen tutorial centres were established in 2002, and provide a flexible option for providing support for students with learning and behaviour problems. The centres assist those students who have behaviour difficulties to overcome their problems and either complete their education or make a successful transition to further training or work.

Victorian Government

Victoria's direction is based on *The Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training pathways in Victoria*, (The Kirby Review), August 2000. Its brief was to review the needs, participation and outcomes of young people in post compulsory education and that logically included identifying those who were missing out and not well served by the arrangements at the time.

It identified significant weaknesses: many young people were falling between the cracks and were lost to education and training; courses were not flexible; institutions were not welcoming to all young people; and administrative structures were not co-ordinated.

The recommendations build on many examples of positive practices in schools, TAFE and the community that the review observed. The core themes that run through the recommendations are:

- Consolidation of the post compulsory phase – greater integration and collaboration among education providers and the community and a more seamless system for young people.
- Greater accountability for all stakeholders in tracking individuals' progress, rapidly intervening for those at risk and improving the coherence of programs and services.
- Strengthened focus on the needs of individual young people rather than being limited by institutional constraints.

In response to the report, the Victorian government has introduced significant changes in the post compulsory years and transition arrangement. These include:

- *New goals* were set by the Premier for post compulsory achievement: 90 percent of young people in Victoria to complete year 12 or its equivalent by 2010, an increase of around 20 per cent; and a goal to increase by 6 per cent the number of fifteen to nineteen year olds in rural and regional locations in education and training.
- *Managed Individual Pathways* provide an individual and formal approach to advice, guidance and planning for transition. These are potentially available to all but have an emphasis on those most in need of advice.
- *Local Learning and Employment Networks* (LLENs) provide a focal point in local communities for cross-sectoral planning, particularly for those needing special transition assistance and identifying employment trends and opportunities. They ideally include community leaders, business, all levels of government and the community sector. There are thirty-one LLENs with areas corresponding to local government boundaries.
- A re-organised *Victorian Qualifications Authority* to ensure coherence in all post compulsory education and training (with the exception of Higher education)
- A new certificate (the *Vocational Certificate of Applied Learning*), now operating in 180 schools and fifteen TAFE institutes, caters for those needing a more flexible learning environment including those re entering education and training.
- *VET in Schools and School-Based New Apprenticeships* continue to expand and will be integrated into more coherent programs of study and training.

Queensland Government

A package of reforms has been instituted in *Education and Training Reforms for the Future: A White Paper* released late 2002. As in other states, there is a focus on removing institutional and cultural barriers to achieving a seamless set of options for students in the post compulsory years. The key aspects of the recent reforms include the following:

- Commencing midway in 2003, trials will occur in six areas that have high youth unemployment or low youth retention and attainment. This will foster a *Community Commitment* by building local partnerships across business, the community and government and non-government service providers. *District Youth Achievement Plans* will set local targets for participation and attainment. The objective is re-engage young people who have left learning and provide education in new learning environments for those not suited to traditional settings.

- Taking effect in 2006, young people will be required to participate in two years of education or training beyond Year 10 or until they achieve a senior certificate or equivalent. This will not apply when a young person turns seventeen years of age.

- Changes to certification will mean that vocational education and training and possible skills learned through employment will be counted towards a *Senior Certificate* from 2006.

- At year 10, schools will develop with students' *individual student plans* for the Senior Phase of Learning. School will register students with the Queensland Studies Authority during year 10 so their progress can be monitored and achievements recorded.

- A range of trials are underway to establish *structural alternatives* for strategies to ensure flexible and diverse options are available for all young people. These include multi-path colleges, senior school options in TAFE, a Youth Access Program that provides basic skills to assist young people enter apprenticeships.

- Improvements will be made to vocational education in schools, building in more workplace experience and ensuring courses lead to qualifications that have status with industry. They will also continue to expand the already excellent School-Based New Apprenticeships through additional incentives.

South Australian Government

A new *Futures Connect* strategy is specifically targeted at supporting all year 12 (or its vocational equivalent) in their transition to an independent adult life. The South Australian government has committed to increasing student retention and improving the 'connectivity'. Their analysis has shown strong links between high levels of truancy and low retention rates. *Futures Connect* differs from previous vocational education initiatives in that it has a multi-dimensional focus – increasing learning opportunities through cross-agency collaboration that will expand learning choices and transition assistance. The *Futures Connect* strategy will complement a range of senior secondary reforms at the years 10 -12 levels and the decision to increase the school leaving age from fifteen years of age to sixteen that raises expectations that more students will say on at school.

The main elements of *Futures Connect* are the following:

- Improved career and transition services will involve each student having a *Transition Plan*. This will consist of a *learning plan* (begins in the middle school by setting goals related to vocational learning opportunities and post-school pathways);a *transition portfolio* (showcases skills and abilities from school, workplaces and community); and an *exit map* (links with a range of providers to facilitate meeting post school goals, including case management needs early support intervention contacts and the likes).

- Funding for these initiatives will be through *seventeen school clusters or FoCIS* (Focus on Connected, Integrated Services). Additional funding will be available for areas of social and economic need. The objective will be to improve attendance, participation and retention. Schools will work with local youth services to provide transition and career assistance. Each cluster will collaborate to develop education and training options in partnership with industry and other agencies. There will be an emphasis on emerging industries and where there are skill shortages.

Western Australian Government

To achieve a target of 90 per cent retention to year 12 the state is determining a range of structural and curriculum measures. Currently a Ministerial *Review of the Interface Between Education and Training in Western Australia* is investigating the most efficient and effective ways of improving retention rates of the 15 – 19 year old cohort. It will identify practices to address barriers impeding access to pathways for students. This is due for finalisation around February 2003.

A major institutional change to facilitate greater alignment of vocational and schools education is the recently announced merger of the two departments administering education and training.

Preceding the current review of the interface between education and training a range of other measures have been instituted.

- Students now have full recognition for their vocational and general education attainments. In addition to the Curriculum Council's WACE accreditation and certification processes, the Registered Training Organisation also provides a Statement of Attainment. The school in turn provides the Curriculum Council with these records for recording as part of the WACE.

- All schools are organised into clusters whose role is to make provision for the delivery of VET across the district. The activities of the clusters includes identifying industry training needs, liaising with industries for the development of school industry partnerships; and offering a broad spectrum of training opportunities for students.

- Recently, four trial cluster sites have commenced a more extensive local co-ordination to improve networks between government and non-government bodies so as to improve access to support services for those at risk of failing to make a positive transition. The strategy will ensure employment and counselling opportunities available at many points in the community are available for those most in need.

Tasmanian Government

The government is currently engaged in developing a draft strategy for the post compulsory years to be released around February 2003. The strategy will maximise system responsiveness by the objectives for funding, structures and policies being primarily framed around the individual making progress in the post compulsory years rather than assuming the institutional status quo applies.

A significant element will be *pathways planing* where all young people are supported in a process to establish a direction for post compulsory study that is related to their needs, interests and ambitions. Those who run the risk of missing out on making a positive transition will be a strong focal point.

Tasmania has a well-established system of senior colleges for the post compulsory years. Retention rates are already improving from what has historically been a low base. *VET in Schools* participation is strong and has a significant workplace-learning component that is a possible motivation for the growing involvement young people.

A *Certificate of Workplace Skills* is already in place to cater for those seeking a more applied set of studies in the final years. Consideration is also being given to forming a single authority to align TAFE and school qualifications.

Consideration is being given to promoting *community business partnerships* and genuinely empowering them to be closely involved in improving transition outcomes. Local area networks might be an approach. However, there is already so much uncoordinated activity in this area and a concern is not to duplicate other efforts to form networks in the community.

An observation on funding is that assisting students at risk of leaving early (e.g. sorting out housing) requires intensive one-on-one interaction. This is costly but there are examples of schools that establish their own priorities and meet these special needs within their allocated resources.

Northern Territory Government

A review, *Future Directions for Secondary Education* is about to commence in 2003 to examine the delivery of secondary education in relation to the needs of school communities and the adequacy of pathways from school to training and employment. The review will consider all aspects of secondary education in urban, rural and remote Government secondary schools.

The government is also designing a *School to Work Strategy* which will determine the actions required to meet transition needs consistent with the features of the MCEETYA *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools*.

A range of initiatives are currently in operation that specifically address the needs of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous rural and remote young people. *VET Training for Rural Youth* targets 14 to 19 year olds who are becoming disengaged from leaning, whether in school or not, and uses VET courses to reintroduce them to learning. A priority is to build these VET initiatives in the communities where the young people live, giving those communities the responsibility to determine the particular options that will involve their young people.

A number of school sector initiatives provide *alternate provision to mainstream provision*. Funds have been allocated to develop educational options that specifically respond to the problems of juvenile crime, substance abuse and poor mental health. One such program is *Alice Outcomes*. It is for 14 to 18 year olds and provides a learning environment without rigid timetables that has individual work programs and support services such as a crèche. Some programs also involve parents who have had negative schooling experiences and an objective is to re-engage them with a positive learning environment. Other programs focus on work ready skills such as responsibility and reliability. The overall objective is to change young peoples' expectations of learning and work and schools are encouraged to develop different ways to respond to needs according o the nature of their communities.

Australian Capital Territory Government

Vet in Schools and more recently *School-Based New Apprenticeships* are regarded as key elements in the transition strategies adopted by the ACT senior colleges. Support by students is strong and their transition outcomes are very positive. Around 50 per cent of students completing Year 12 have at least one VET qualification as part of their senior school certificate.

Pathways Plans are being piloted for Years 9 and 10 students in 2003 with consideration given to extending this through to Years 11 and 12. The plans will include an electronic portfolio of academic, vocational and recreational achievements to provide continuity in recording and valuing young peoples' achievements and experiences.

The need to ensure all young people make an effective transition from the 7-10 High Schools to the 11-12 Colleges is being pursued though using vocational experiences to assist re-engage the interests of those most at risk of leaving early. An initial pre-apprenticeship program was conducted for a group of year 10 students in one location with the building and construction industry and this is being extended elsewhere in 2003. The objective is to ensure those young people either manage the transition to the college system and Years 11 and 12 or take up an apprenticeship.

High Schools are also using access to short *taster courses* in TAFE to open young peoples' eyes to the variety of transitional pathways available.

A recent *Review of Career Advisory Services* identified the lack of coherence in available services and has recommended a body be established to provide leadership and co-ordination in this area. On going training of teachers will be a priority to equip them to conduct career advice and use the vast array of services and material that is available.

Section Three

Transition Strategies: Progress Around Australia

This section provides an indicative assessment of progress to date based on the previous snapshot of policies and initiatives that are underway around Australia. The nationally agreed framework for vocational education in schools established in 2001 draws on the OECD observations and principles outlined earlier. The national framework, consisting of six aspects of effective transition strategies, draws on international trends and advice from the OECD that Australia did not have in place adequate strategies for those at risk leaving school early. These transition features and elements are used below as the structure for an indicative assessment of progress to date.

Explicit and Well Articulated Pathways

Strong progress

This finds its expression in the expansion of pathways through the introduction of VET in Schools and School-Based New Apprenticeships.

VET in Schools is the main feature and is offered in around 90 % of secondary schools. The depth and time required and the role of work placements varies widely across the country as systems have introduced VET in Schools according to their own curriculum design.

There has been moderate success with the introduction of School-Based New Apprenticeships, which are now around 2 per cent of VET in School enrolments, although structural and cultural barriers currently impede expansion. Queensland stands out in having around 60 per cent of School-Based New Apprenticeships although some other states have developed VET in Schools to a greater extent. School-Based New Apprenticeships are also markedly skewed to those industry sectors that already employ large numbers of young people in casual employment such as retail and hospitality with very few in the areas of skill shortage and new and emerging industries. Forthcoming enhanced employer incentives for School-Based New Apprenticeships by the Commonwealth Government are likely to drive further growth.

For both VET in Schools and School-Based New Apprenticeships there are issues to resolve concerning industry coverage, assuring quality that meets the expectations of employers and unions, gaining sufficient industry support for workplace experience, relations between school and TAFE and on-going resourcing. The aim of governments is to ensure these initiatives are sustainable within available resources and become established features of post compulsory schooling.

A further challenge is to market the initiatives to business. There is a degree of confusion in business about the range of school based vocational initiatives being developed, especially those who request a special role for enterprises. There is great potential to harness the support of business but the parameters of their involvement need to be better explained.

Importantly, qualifications regimes are being adapted to be more inclusive of mixing vocational and general education options in post compulsory years but arriving at parity of assessment is complex. Also, new re-entry certificates are emerging in some jurisdictions and they are mixing, in innovative ways, the elements of vocational studies that provide the best pathways for those most at risk of not succeeding in the mainstream.

TAFE is also catering more for the students who are returning to study as a result of the Youth Allowance or other mechanisms but may not be well-equipped to do this effectively without further support. NSW and Victoria, in particular, observe a new TAFE population of 15-17 year olds who are or have been early school leavers with multiple barriers to achieving positive outcomes. These young people do not wish to return to school – where they have already failed to succeed – and prefer the more adult TAFE environment. While around 25 percent (in Victoria) do not remain enrolled for any significant period of time the rest do, although courses have to be customised to take their needs into account. They often have unstable homes, poor literacy and numeracy, poor social skills and the like and the more autonomous and adult TAFE environment is not always suitable without the provision of additional personal support and special courses. Where support is available, benefits can be seen is as little as six months.

Lifelong Learning Skills and Attributes and Enterprise and Innovation

Slow Progress

This transition feature is about enterprise and vocational learning being incorporated into all levels of schooling to improve transition outcomes. To date however, the concepts appear vague and the particular responses required by schools are not well defined. Adoption of 'enterprise education' is patchy, although there has been longstanding adoption of work-experience or work-education. The *Employability Skills Framework*, developed by the Business Council of Australia in conjunction with The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has the potential to provide the conceptual framework for this area. The Commonwealth body the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation will build greater capacity for business involvement. Nationally, advice is being prepared about a high level strategy for taking this objective further.

Individual Assistance for Students at Risk and Career Information and Guidance

Slow Progress

The needs of young people at risk of leaving school early and best practice strategies for engaging them are well documented and international examples – such as the Nordic countries – provide inspiration. Strategies exist for preparing exit plans, providing case management for those in need and tracking school leavers to marshal additional support beyond school. The challenges are the cost of this level of one-one-one support, gaining the necessary support of others in the community and changing mainstream practices. In particular, maximising support services for those most at risk requires ambitious cross-sectoral strategies. A 2002 national commitment to an action plan for cross-agency collaboration shows promise but there is little evidence to date that the cross-government effort explicitly ties other government departments to the strategies of the Ministers for Education.

Expanding career education is expensive and complex. An extensive variety of practices are in operation but lack coherence and coordination for clients. In schools, the specific allocation of careers teachers varies and roles and responsibilities are often confused. A National Blueprint is being developed in 2003, drawing on a successful Canadian approach that will spell out the core requirements and responsibilities.

Community Partnerships

Strong Progress

The formation of partnerships with business and community is a ubiquitous feature of the transition policies emerging around the country. A number of jurisdictions have formally called for innovative local community networks to co-ordinate services and capture commitment of business, local providers and the like. These initiatives are directing attention to the local community level as the new site for building social and economic solutions.

However, forming voluntary partnerships calls for a different approach to public policy. Partnerships cannot be mandated by public policy – government can invite networks and partnerships to form but the real challenge is in defining an inviting and substantive role that ensures support by main stakeholders. Reports indicate that local area networks such as in Victoria vary in the degree to which they attract business support for example. Local employers most likely want to assist but resist spending time in routine program management tasks. While schools are relatively inexperienced in relationship building with enterprises, TAFE already has many industry networks and could assist schools with enterprise links.

Supportive Institutional and Funding Arrangements

Moderate Progress

A distinguishing feature of this recent round of reviews and policies for transition is that the individual is a focus of initiatives rather than the institution or the program. One of the major challenges in achieving this ambitious objectives is to generate flexible and cross-sectoral co-operation where institutional boundaries are not an obstacle. For this to be sustainable, arrangements need to be institutionalised through structural changes, funding and performance accountabilities. Recent structural initiatives are occurring in a number of jurisdictions for example, schools and TAFE administrations are being merged and TAFE and schools qualifications authorities are being amalgamated. Multi-campus sites are operating and some local education providers are developing highly flexible approaches to student movements. Consideration is being also given in some jurisdictions to how resource allocation could follow the young person's choice of learning location.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Moderate Progress.

Collecting data is essential for identifying who is succeeding and who is missing out. However, outcomes are the most problematic to ascertain for those who fall between the cracks because they become invisible with few agencies if any, caring for their activities.

New student exit tracking plans are yielding positive results for many schools. Their challenge is to institute approaches with other agencies to track at risk young people for extended periods of time rather than just for six months beyond school. Again, this requires a new level of co-operation among local agencies.

Aligning schools and TAFE data gathering is occurring at a national level and strong national forums facilitate the sharing of evaluations. However, different administrative histories and conventions around Australia often inhibit simple transfer of good practice.

Challenges for Government, Business and Community

Solutions to the transition needs of those young people currently failing to make smooth progress to independent adult life are not simple. Transition needs have changed dramatically in past two decades with the restructuring of the youth labour market. Targets for increasing participation, retention and student achievement will mean more young people staying on in education and training institutions but they may experience multiple and serious barriers to achieving good outcomes. Solutions are not only the responsibility of education and training sectors but are the responsibility of other areas of government and, as seen in international best practice, responsibility is also shared with parts of business and the community.

The task for institutions will be to motivate and genuinely raise the achievement levels of those at risk of not succeeding. Given the state of play in Australia the challenges seem to fall into four main areas: achieving the ambitious cross-government collaboration on which solutions depend; building genuine local community accountability; accepting mainstream responsibility for the resource intensive nature of assisting those missing out; and dealing more effectively with the contributing factors to poor engagement with schooling in the years prior to the post compulsory levels. These challenges are explained below:

- A fundamental need is achieving the high-level institutional flexibility and cross-government co-ordination on which solutions depend. Adopting a focus on the needs of individuals and expecting institutions to be responsive and co-ordinate their programs sounds logical but is a considerable challenge for government bureaucracies. This is a matter for governments to determine. Leaving institutional co-ordination to the discretion of the agencies themselves will not achieve the desired outcomes.

- The notion of partnerships is ubiquitous in the policies and programs reviewed in this paper. Engaging the interest and assistance of the local or regional communities, especially enterprises, is central to sharing responsibility and accountability for the quality of outcomes for all young people. However, government has to find innovative ways to proceed – it cannot mandate partnerships and voluntary community involvement that include commercial and non-government organisations. Business and community also need to communicate how they wish to be involved. The site for solutions is shifting to the local area and, along with generating partnerships, community focused activities call for a new public policy framework to facilitate the shared ownership of social conditions. Strengthening local accountability and making the community the site for innovative solutions would require a change in the prevailing public policy framework and is consistent with what is known to be international best practice.

- Making the hard decisions on resource allocation should mean solutions for those at risk of not achieving good transition outcomes are not just tacked onto the mainstream provision. Education and training institutions have always dealt with those with special needs. The change recognised by reforms occurring around Australia is that those who are still missing out will be increasingly difficult to accommodate without a resource injection and institutional change.

- Achieving the anticipated retention and transition success rates in many cases requires increasing representation from those groups currently under represented – those from rural areas, males, low-income family backgrounds, those with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills and those who express little engagement with schooling. Changing the patterns for these groups needs to commence in the early years of schooling and continue through to the post compulsory years. That opens a further set of challenges.

The OECD identified a 'youth friendly' labour market as a requirement for successful transition pathways. A role for Australian business is to engage as an active partner in the transition activities now being generated around Australia.

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